

SAFEGUARD YOUR HEALTH AGAINST PNEUMONIA

Your most valuable asset remains your health and wellbeing, which is why we are always striving to bring our members new ways of proactively protecting it.

Your option includes a Wellness Benefit that offers certain members a pneumonia vaccination, and we urge you to consider making use of this great benefit to safeguard your health against this life-threatening illness. Please refer to your benefit guide regarding the criteria for accessing this benefit (for example, age specifications). Your consultation fee will be covered from another benefit category, if relevant to your option and if you have remaining benefit limit, rather than from the Wellness Benefit.

The article below contains useful information about pneumonia and we highly recommend that you discuss the need for vaccination with your doctor.

CUT YOUR PNEUMONIA RISK THIS WINTER

Along with HIV/Aids and strokes, pneumonia is now a leading cause of death in South Africa. It is worth taking note of this deadly disease – and how to prevent it.

Every year, an estimated 300 000 to 500 000 South Africans are struck by pneumonia, a lung infection that can be confined to a single lobe or segment of the lung, or may involve several areas of the lung and result in a high fever, coughing and severe chest pain.

Although anyone can become infected with pneumonia, it is especially worrisome as far as older adults, babies and people with pre-existing illnesses are concerned,

since their immune systems are often not strong enough to fight the infection.

Despite these stark figures, pneumonia is a very treatable condition, provided you spot it early and get appropriate treatment as soon as possible. Read on to lower your risk of infection and improve your chances of recovery if you are unfortunate enough to become infected.

Causes

Many underlying health problems increase your pneumonia risk. These include:



Cigarette smoking



Alcohol or drug abuse



Viral respiratory tract infections such as influenza or parainfluenza (this closely resembles the flu)



Cancer or cancer-related treatment



Chronic-obstructive pulmonary disease, or bronchiectasis (abnormal widening of the airways)



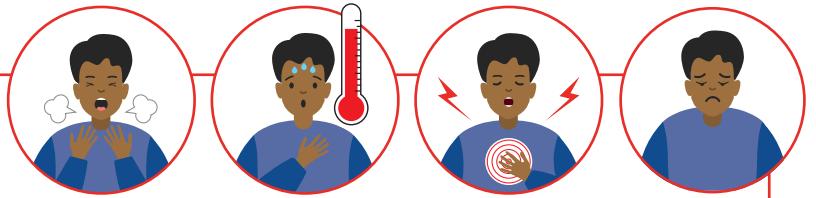
Institutionalisation in hospitals or old-age homes, or following a stroke

Symptoms

Common symptoms of pneumonia include:

- Fever of 38.5°C or more with chills or shaking
- Cough, which often produces sputum from the airways. The colour of the phlegm may be green or rusty, occasionally with blood specks. Sometimes no sputum is produced.
- Night sweats
- Shallow, rapid breathing and rapid heart rate
- Chest pain, which is worsened on inhalation or coughing. This may be only on one side and felt deep in the chest.
- Tiredness, body weakness (general malaise) and/or confusion (particularly in the elderly)

These symptoms depend on age and other underlying health problems. In elderly people, symptoms may be much less obvious. Shortness of breath is not easy to spot, but may be suspected when talking becomes interrupted and difficult.



Take action

Prevention is always better than cure, so it is important to take care of your health throughout the year and especially during winter. One way to do this is to get vaccinated.

Vaccines that help protect you against the most common bacterial cause of pneumonia are available. Your doctor will be able to advise which vaccine is most suitable for you (this will depend on your age and other risk factors). While these vaccines may not always prevent pneumonia, they may prevent serious complications.

The following will also greatly reduce your risk of pneumonia:



Quit smoking.



Do not use recreational drugs.



Drink alcohol in moderation.



Wash your hands regularly.



Avoid contact with people who have colds, flu, and other infections.

The path to recovery

Keep the following in mind if you do get pneumonia:

- Pneumonia always requires prompt medical care.
- The sooner you start treatment, the sooner you are likely to get better.
- Sometimes a hospital stay is needed, but many people can be treated at home.
- Even if you begin to feel better, keep following your doctor's instructions.
- Take your prescription medication exactly as indicated.
- Be patient with yourself. It might take a while for your energy levels to return to normal.
- Force yourself to get enough rest, otherwise the infection may return.

Keep in mind that prevention is always better than cure. Find out more about your pneumonia vaccination benefit and protect yourself and your loved ones against the risk!



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